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CALIFORNIANS ARE NOT PREPARED FOR PROBABILITY OF LONG-TERM CARE ACCORDING TO STATEWIDE STUDY

SACRAMENTO - While more than half of all seniors will need long-term care in their lifetime, a statewide poll by the Field Institute released today by the California Department of Health Services (CDHS) shows that Californians are not prepared to face this costly financial and emotional reality. Misconceptions and a general lack of awareness of the costs and realities surrounding long-term care characterize the response of more than 1,000 Californians.

"These findings serve as a wake-up call to all Californians," said State Health Director Diana M. Bontá, R.N., Dr.P.H., who noted that May is Long-Term Care Awareness Month. "The emotional pain so often attached to helping a loved one in need of long-term care is only magnified by the ever-increasing costs associated with that care. Californians need to fully understand this issue and successfully plan for it."

While average nursing home care costs in California can soar well beyond \$50,000 per year, the survey found that only one out of five respondents is aware of this reality. This finding suggests there is a significant gap between the perceived and true costs of long-term care.

Respondents not only underestimate the cost of care but also hold misguided expectations. More than 55 percent of respondents with private health insurance said they believed that their policies cover long-term care or were uncertain. Since almost no health insurance plan covers long-term care for an extended period of time, a significant number of Californians are living under the false security that they have long-term care coverage, according to the survey.

Statistically, however, almost 50 percent of individuals 65 and older will spend some time in a nursing facility even though only one out of 10 polled have invested in a program to cover the costs of long-term care. The survey found that 44.9 percent of respondents said they have less than a 25 percent chance of being admitted to a nursing home, and Asians, African-Americans and Latinos underestimated by an even greater margin the likelihood that they will spend time in a nursing home.

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To increase awareness among California consumers regarding the potential need and cost for long-term care, the state of California formed the California Partnership for Long-Term Care (CPLTC). In conjunction with private long-term care insurance companies, the partnership seeks to educate Californians about affordable means of planning ahead for their potential long-term care needs.

"Long-term care is an uncomfortable subject for most Californians," explained Sandra Pierce-Miller, project director for CPLTC which commissioned the Field Poll. "We have to move beyond the awkwardness and face this reality head-on. This survey clearly shows that Californians are not financially prepared for dealing with long-term care. This lack of preparedness, combined with the emotional challenges and even a potential loss in job productivity for a family caregiver, can devastate a family. Planning today can take the sting out of this reality."

The most often cited reasons why respondents to the Field Poll do not invest in long-term care insurance programs included: cost, distrust, a perceived lack of need and limited consideration of the need for long-term care insurance. But the findings also point to cultural issues. Among Asian and Latino respondents, there is a high expectation that their children or other relatives will provide or help pay for the costs of long-term care.

For more information on the CPLTC, call 1-800-CARE-445 or visit the Web site at www.dhs.ca.gov/cpltc.